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EAST TIMOR

THE LABOR GOVERNMENT AND A.L.P. POLICY

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The annexation of East Timor was an illegal act. Indonesia's attack on East Timor and the denial of East Timorese self-determination are clear violations of international law. Indonesian justifications for the invasion and claims about self-determination having been exercised are factually and legally unsupportable.

Successive Australian and American administrations have admitted that a proper act of self-determination has never taken place. Neither Indonesian economic development programs nor the passage of time can change that fact.

Only a minority of countries formally recognise East Timor's incorporation into Indonesia. East Timor remains on the U.N. Agenda and is currently the subject of a series of consultations under the auspices of the U.N. Secretary-General.

How then do we evaluate Prime Minister Hawke's statement in an interview on Indonesian TV that Australia recognises Indonesian sovereignty over East Timor?

A Labor Government in Australia remains a major hope of the East Timorese in their plea for a just and lasting solution. The failure of the Labor Government to pursue a principled course on a matter in our immediate region will represent a lost opportunity for the East Timorese, a further loss of credibility amongst our traditional supporters and leave us open to the charge that we are only prepared to grandstand on admittedly important but distant issues where our influence is relatively marginal.

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There is no doubt that it is in the interests of both Australia and Indonesia to have "good relations" with each other. But it is Indonesia which is responsible for the occupation of East Timor and it is Indonesia which must take the steps to right the wrong which is a barrier to good relations. Surely honesty and integrity are essential elements of a good relationship. Turning a blind eye to indefensible actions are not the basis for a good long-term relationship.

Failure to support what is right will continue to make us appear weak and vacillating. The only demonstrable effect of our accommodation of Indonesia over the last two years has been to make it easier for Jakarta to conduct a major military operation in East Timor from September 1983 to late 1984.

The spirit of the 1984 National Conference resolution is quite clearly opposed to recognition of Indonesian sovereignty:

> "The ALP expresses its continuing concern at the situation in East Timor, particularly its officially stated objection to the fact that the former Portuguese colony was incorporated without the East Timorese people having been given an adequate opportunity to express their own wishes through an internationally supervised act of self-determination.
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> The ALP indicates grave concern at reports of renewed fighting in East Timor and about the threats to human life and safety there, and calls on the Indonesian Government to give free access to humanitarian relief teams, to international organisations such as Red Cross, Amnesty and the Commission of Jurists, and to allow an independent international mission to enter the territory to make an independent and impartial report on conditions.
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> Accordingly, the ALP calls on the Australian Labor Government to give active support to international initiatives, that have the aim of achieving a settlement of the Timor problem. Specificially, the Government should support the efforts of the U.N. Secretary-General to bring about a solution."

Rather than recognising sovereignty, ALP policy officially objects to the incorporation without an internationally supervised act of self determination. The policy calls for active support for investigative missions to Timor and international initiatives, including that of the UN Secretary-General. That call clearly suggests the need for continued attempts for a proper solution for the East Timorese and suggests anything but acceptance of Indonesian sovereignty.

The 1982 UN Resolution on East Timor called on the UN Secretary-General to consult with "all parties" with the view to finding a solution to the Timor issue. Far from supporting this process, Mr. Hawke's statement would appear to undermine the legitimacy of the Secretary-General's mandate.

Portuguese reaction to Mr. Hawke's statement is an indication of the importance of Australian Government views on Timor. It confirms the private views of officials of some regional and Western European Government's that if Australia, as a major regional country took a proper principled stand on the issue, other countries would 'buy into' the debate.

A firm expression of our opinions may not be welcomed by the Suharto regime, but in the long term it will win us that respect we have sacrificed in recent years, and which is so important in the conduct of relations between states. It could also strengthen the hand of those Indonesians who are opposed to their Government's policies in Timor. It will strengthen our statements of concern over developments in West Irian as well.

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How then should we respond to Mr. Hawke's statement?

It is important for the ALP at all levels to point out to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Affairs Minister, that:

- Recognition of Indonesian sovereignty goes against the spirit of current ALP policy and does not reflect the view of a broad section of the ALP and the wider community.

- Labor Party policy does anything but affirm Indonesian sovereignty.

- We should call on the Government to implement ALP policy by actively and openly supporting international initiatives directed at achieving a just and lasting solution to the Timor question.

- As a first step, Australia should be insisting that any process aimed at a solution should involve a proper consultation with the East Timorese people themselves.

- In the longer term, thought should be given to strengthening current ALP policy by removing ambiguities and affirming Labor's active support for East Timorese self-determination.

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